

The Dark Root -Part 2

by Ludwig

Category: Angel
Genre: Adventure
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2000-05-17 09:00:00
Updated: 2000-05-17 09:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:01:16
Rating: T
Chapters: 1
Words: 5,625
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: See part 1

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> <meta name="Generator"> -Titre: Sins of the Father ****

**Titre: **The Black Root

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**Type: **Angel/Buffy Crossover Event

**Timeline: **Shortly before 5x5/New Moon Rising

Chapter Two

"Are you quite certain you're all right?" Wesley asked the vampire as the later was extracting the last bullet from his chest. Upon returning from his trip to the licencing office, he had come down in his employer's lair to find the later operating on himself. Making a loud grunt, Angel shot his companion a meaningful glare and threw the bloody knife on the table.

"Hand me those bandages if you please,Wesley."

The young man complied then sat back down and winced as he waited for the vampire to be done. Angel had been shot before but the sight of someone cutting his skin open to extract pieces of lead still made the former watcher a little queezy.

"Maybe next time you should consider aquiering a bullet-proof vest before you speak to the lovely miss Lockley again. It would probably still be very much painfull but at least,it will less messy afterwards."

Angel couldn't help but smile at that last comment. Wesley certainly had a way with words. He quickly finished covering the wounds and got up to find himself another shirt.

"Kate brought so work our way. A double homicide on the beach front last night."

He pointed to the pictures on the table for Wesley to look at. The young man examined them one by one in silence.

"My goodness." He finally said. "Whoever did this certainly didn't want to leave anything for the crows,so to speak."

"No they didn't. I was hoping you might have come across something like that during your years in the watchers council."

Wesley looked the photos over again and shook his head

"I'm afraid not. The bodies look dessecated,as do insects that have been caught in a spider's web. What about you? Any theories"

"Several. All of them more unpleasant than the last but none on which i'd build a case at this point."

"Could it possibly be the doing of a Master moving in on Los Angeles?"

"I can't say for certain,but i doubt it," Angel said as he finished buttoning up his shirt. "For one thing,a Master wouldn't be so reckless with the disposal of his victims as to just dump them on a beach. Moreover if a Master had come here,i would have heard about it by now because they usualy prepare their potential new homes by sending their minions ahead to get rid of any threats prior to their arrival. Noâ€|whatever did this is something i've never seen in over two hundred years of existance and that,as you indicated,is not found in the council's records."

"I guess this means we have our work cut out for us. Where do you suggest we start?"

Angel grabbed a map of Los Angeles on his desk and un-rolled it on the table.

"Wellâ€|since the attack took place on the beach,that seems as good a place to start as any. I'll go have a look tonight. As for you and Cordeliaâ€|he added hesitantly. "Tomorrow morning you'll both go to the police station to get any info you can about further

victims."

"Why wait for tomorrow?" asked Wesley. "There's still plenty of time for us to go tonight."

"No!" retorted the vampire. "You're both going to stay here tonight. I want you where I can call on you at a moment's notice. Besides, whatever's out there is may be very dangerous and I happen to like you both just the way you look right now."

"I don't think that's veryâ€¦"

Suddenly, they were both interrupted by a loud crashing noise coming from the office, where Cordelia had stayed. As one, they got up and literally flew up the stairs. They found the young woman lying on the floor, whining and holding her head, which they recognized as the symptom of one of her visions. When Doyle had died not so long ago, he had left Cordelia his gift of visions, a means by which the Power That Be could communicate to Angel whatever task they needed accomplished. The visions themselves were always accompanied by splitting migraines but this time seemed considerably worse than usual. Cordelia was virtually writhing on the floor and she looked positively terrified by what she was experiencing. Angel picked her up and sat her on his chair while Wesley fetched a glass of water for her. The vampire held her hand until the vision passed and then, when it was over, she burst into tears. He tried to comfort her as best he could.

"There, there." He said, holding her close to him while stroking her hair. "It's all over now. Shhh. Come on, that's my girl."

After a while, she finally calmed down. Angel was at a loss to understand. Cordelia had vision before but she never reacted so strongly to them. Wesley handed her a handkerchief with which she wiped her tears and blew her nose.

"Are you OK?" asked Wesley softly. "Would you like to lie down for a while?"

"Oh God! That was horribleâ€¦ just horrible." She said, looking as though she was going to cry again. "They're all dead. All of them. Everybodyâ€¦ everywhere."

"Who was dead?" Angel asked, concerned. "What did you see?"

"They were all dead. All over the city, the streets were filled with corpsesâ€¦ rotting corpses everywhere. Men, women, little childrenâ€¦ it was horrible. And then, in the middle of all thisâ€¦ carnage, there he was."

"Who?" both men said at the same time.

"It was a young man. One I've never seen before. He was walking in the street. He was walking in the street and with every step he took, he seemed to grow older and olderâ€¦ until he looked barely able to stand. And yet, he kept walking ever onwardâ€¦ and he was calling a name. But I couldn't make it out. He was repeating it over and over again as he walked. It sounded something like *lirycs*â€¦ or *limits*. I'm not sureâ€¦ I'm sorry."

"There's no need to be." Wesley reassured her, placing his hands on

her shoulder. "I'm certain we'll figure it all out. In the meantime, I suggest—"

His voice trailed off when he noticed that Angel was looking at Cordelia in a strange way.

"What's wrong, Angel?" he asked the vampire. "Is there a problem?"

The vampire knelt down beside the young woman and took both of her hands.

"Cordelia—this is very important so I need you to tell me—the name you say the old man kept repeating." He waited for a moment before he continued. "Could it have been Lilith?"

"Lilith! Yes that's it! Lilith. That's the name he was calling for. How did you know?"

Angel suddenly grew paler than usual and he looked at her in disbelief. Wesley too seemed very much concerned by this revelation. Cordelia, seeing the look of distress on both their faces, was also starting to worry.

"So guys, who the hell is Lilith?" she asked nervously.

"There's no need to concern yourself with that right now, Cordelia." answered Wesley as he gave her the glass of water he was still holding. "Just rest for a while and let us worry about it."

Angel got back up on his feet and headed for the door. Wesley immediately went after him and caught the vampire by his arm.

"You're not seriously considering to go out there, are you?"

"Doesn't look like I have much of a choice here, Wesley," Angel said as he freed his arm. "If Cordelia's right about this, the two people on the beach were just the beginning. I have to—"

"You have to stop and think about this, Angel. If Cordelia is—" Wesley stopped and looked back at the young woman. Then, lowering his tone he continued. "If she's right and this is the doing of Lilith, we may be dealing with something that is very much out of our league. I think we will need some help."

"I know what you're thinking and that's completely out of the question!" the vampire declared. "I don't want her involved in this. Besides, we don't even know what we're dealing with yet so let's not jump the gun here, ok?"

"All right—but at least let me call Giles. He may have access to more information than we do on the subject. And don't be concerned, I'll ask Giles to be discreet."

Angel gave a long look of apprehension but he obviously didn't want to argue any further so he simply nodded and left the office. Wesley moved the drapes of the window to see the vampire vanish in the night and then went to his desk to pick up the phone.

Meanwhile, in Sunnydale, Cal.

"Yes of course,Wesley." Said Giles,talking over the phone. "I have your fax number here so i'll send you everything i have right away. But are you certain about this?"

"Not really but i dont call the shots anymore," answered Wesley. "Anyway,thanks for your help,Giles. Hopefully,i'll talk to you soon. Good by."

"Good by,Wesley."

The old librarian hung up the phone but kept staring at the wall for a moment longer,still processing what he had just been told. He then turn around to go get his books but nearly jumped when he saw Buffy standing in his living room with a mixer in her arms.

"Good Lord Buffy! You scared the bejesus out of me! What are you doing,sneaking in my home like that?"

The young woman handed the mixer to him

"I was returning this for mom. She says thanks."

"Oh!" he said,taking the kitchen tool and setting it down besides the phone. "Heuâ€|do tell he it was my pleasure. Butâ€|heuâ€|how long have you been standing there?"

" Judging from your reaction,long enough to hear something i wasn't supposed to. Whats going on?"

"Oh,nothing really. That was Wesley on the phone and he just was just gathering some data on a case he's working on in L.A.. Its nothing for you to worry about."

"Seems to me you're the one 'worrying about it'. That usually mean i should be worried as well."

"I'm telling you,you're making too much of this," Giles added.

"Giles?" she said coily. "We've know each other for some time now,haven't we? So tell me; in your opinion,what are the odds that i'm simply gonna drop this,hmm?"

The older man sighed loudly and rolled his eyes,knowing only too well the answer to that.

"Keeping this from you was not my idea,Buffy," Giles finally said. "He didn't want to involve you."

"Who,Wesley?" she asked. But just then,she realised the request would have come from Angel himself. Ever since he left Sunnydale,she had seen him only once; in a five minute meeting in his office in Los Angeles where she had told him that because of the history the shared,it was best that they stayed away from one another. That had seemed the best course of action,given the circomstances and specially now,with Riley in her life. But to Buffy,that had never meant turning her back on him if he was in grave dangerâ€|which appeared to be the case right now.

"So tell me Giles. What going on over there?"

Back in Los Angeles, Wesley was fetching the last fax sent to him by Giles at his request. He assembled all the papers and sat down at his desk to examine them. Unfortunately, it was not nearly as complete as he had hoped it would be. Most of the information pertaining to Lilith that Giles had sent him was in the form of riddles and old folktales and many were contradicting one another over who Lilith had been and where she had come from. For instance, some story depicted Lilith as a Babylonian goddess of evil while others claimed she was Sumerian in origin. Some of the tales even suggested she might have been the first "Eve" but that because she refused to submit to Adam's will, she was replaced by a more obedient wife. But the Council of Watchers had always held the theory that Lilith was nothing less than the first vampire to appear on the world. There were some documents on the subject stored in the Watcher's enclave in England but only members of the inner circle had access to them.

"Who's Lilith, Wesley?" Cordelia asked, startling him out of his thoughts. He just looked at her in silence for a moment and returned to his reading.

"Wesley, I must know, please." she insisted. The young man looked at her again and sighed.

"Well, Lilith is a name that has popped up in many cultures over the span of human history. And in every instance, she was being portrayed as some sort of evil creature that lives to inflict torment on others. The Watchers Council believes that the reason for this is because she is actually much older than any of these cultures and has travelled all over the world, wreaking havoc wherever she went. They even believe that Lilith may actually be the Dark Root."

"Dark Root?" Cordelia repeated hesitantly.

"Yes. According to ancient lore, demons ruled over the earth very long ago. But then, something happened that chased most of them back to hell and gave rise to humanity. However, some of the demons remained and at some point in earlier times, one of them attacked a human. This person reportedly did not die but instead was transformed into a half-human/half-demon immortal creature that could only sustain its existence by drinking the blood of other humans. In short, it became the Black Root; the first vampire of the world. And there are many who believe that this person might have been a woman named Lilith."

The young woman said nothing for a while, pondering on the meaning of what she had just been told. Then, she suddenly looked at Wesley with wide eyes.

"And you let Angel go after this monster alone?!" she yelled at him. "Are you both crazy?!"

"Cordelia calm down! We don't know that the murderer we're looking for is in fact Lilith. That was just a supposition based on something you thought you heard during a particularly horrendous vision. Angel is right. We shouldn't jump to any conclusion before we have a better indication of what we're dealing with here."

"Haven't you been listening? Streets filled with rotting cadavers. That all the 'indication' I need."

"Well what do you propose we do then?" he asked her, getting out of his chair.

"What do you think?! We pack our bags and get the hell out of Dodge. I hear anywhere-but-this-place is lovely this time of the year."

"Cordelia wait!" he said as he grabbed her by the shoulders and forced her to sit down. "Look. I realise that you're afraid. And, your vision certainly did not give you any reason to feel otherwise but thats what it was; a vision. We know that those visions are sent to you by the Powers That Be to help us fight the wrongs of this world. I think the vision you had was a warning for us. A warning of what might occur if we stand by and do nothing to stop whatever evil now roams the city. Besides, you know as well as i do that Angel will not abandon these people to their fate, anymore than he would abandon you or me. Would you really turn your back on him now?"

Cordelia was far from being reassured but at least she had calmed down somewhat.

"Humph! Thats the trouble with having friends." she shot him with a half smile. "You always have to die with them."

Chapter Three

The city of Angels. That denomination had always amused Jordan. Specially eversince he had come here, a couple of years ago. When outsiders heard about Los Angeles, their thoughts invariably went to movie stars, chic restaurants, imense shopping malls and opulant wealth. Here, one could become everything he or she ever wanted to be; rich, famous and the envie of everybody else. Thats what they all thought anyway.

But Jordan knew better. He knew that the same rules that applies everywhere else applied here as well. That for everyone that makes it, a thousand will fall flat on their face. That the big fish will always devour the little one. And, most importantly, that there are no more angels in this city than in any other in the world. You have to look out for yourself. Thats what he knew. If you're gonna live in a pirhana pond, then be the most voracious of the bunch. That was his creed.

The last part had taken a whole new meaning eversince he became a vampire. Only ten years had past since that fatefull night and allready he was the leader of his gang. True there was not that many of them right now but time was on his side anyway. And, things had been going well for him until the arrival of Angel that is. The much older vampire had supposedly been cursed with a soul a while back and now, felt compelled to do the 'right thing' whatever that meant. Before his coming, Jordan's gang had pretty much free reign over this part of town. Now, they were lucky if they weren't staked in the middle of a quiet meal.

Thats what he was thinking about when his second in command, a short burly vamp called Razor, returned him to reality. They were both hiding on a roof over an alley, waiting for some sweet young thing to come their way. Now, his burly companion was tugging on his shirt and pointing to the nearly deserted street below.

"Look,Jordi!" he said with his annoying shrill voice. "There comes one now. Not bad if ya ask me."

The older vamp looked to where Razor was pointing to evaluate his find. It was a woman,probably mid twenty-ish of about average heights and weight. She had curly short hair black hair,a rather generous bust and was dressed in a tight little black leather number that left little of her long legs to the imagination. From their vantage point,they could see she was wearing heavy make-up which,along with her provocative attire,marked her as a prostitute.

"Ah dammit!" said Jordan. "Not another one. Seems all we get nowadays are hookers and passed out drunkards. What i wouldn't give for just a drop of pure,fresh blood for a change."

"Whats da matter with ya? Ya wanna wait around fur some blond, virgin farm girl ta come and take a stroll in this trash heap? Come on! We take what we can get,dig?"

Jordan sighed and glared at his lieutenant but the lout was right. He threw one last look around to make sure the coast was clear and,quietly,they left their hiding place and descended on the street. The woman passed them by and they came out behind her. Sensing their presence,she whirled around to see the two young men dressed like a couple of skateboard kids smiling at her

"Well hello there," she said teasingly. "You lookin' for a party?"

"Actually,we both work for the american red cross,mam." answered Jordan as his face changed from human to its more feral nature. "Wanna give some blood?"

The hooker yelled in terror and fled down the street,with the two of them running behind her,laughing maniacaly. They could have caught her anytime but the vampires wanted to have some fun before their evening meal. They systematicaly ran her down towards a deserted alley where they planed to make the kill and leave the body once they were done. But as she entered the alley,she knocked over a trash can as she passed that tripped them up when they came in after her. Still looking behind to see them getting up,she ran down the alley as fast as she could and right into a tall man that was standing in the middle of it.

"Hey,little missy," he said with a smile. "You should really watch where you're going like that."

"Oh please mister," she pleaded with him. "You gotta help me. There's a couple of wackos back there that are chasing me."

And as she did,the two vampires caught up with them. Gently,the man shoved the young hooker behind him and re-adjusted his red bandana. He then turned to the vamps,looking at them menacingly.

"Evening boys," he said in a low voice. "Anything i can help you with?"

Angel came running down the street as fast as he could. He had been patrolling the area,hoping to find the mysterious attacker that killed

the kids on the beach,when he heard a woman's cry for help. These streets were not very popular during the day and virtually desert at night. He couldn't see anyone in the imediate vicinity but then the vampire noticed a trash can rolling out of an alley a little further down the street. He ran up to it and as he was about to turn the street corner,Angel was nearly run down by two fleeing vamps that were speeding away as though they were being chased by the hosts of hell. He was about to go after them but then he stopped,his noze catching a familiar scent coming from the alley.

—

Buffy?

—

He entered the alley,expecting to find his former girlfriend there but instead,he was surprised to come across a man in a grey duster confortng what looked like a prostitute.

"Everything ok in here,folks?" Angel said as he approched them

"We're just peachy,friend. Thanks for your concern." Answered the man as he looked at him. But then,he frowned and imediatly stepped between the vampire and the young woman,as if to protect her from him.

"Thats close enough,pal." He said. Then he half turned to the woman hiding behind him. "Cindy. This alley extis on a populated street. Go,now!"

The young woman,needing no further proding,ran towards the other end of the alley,leaving the two men alone. When he was satisfied that she was gone,The bandana man again turned his attention to Angel.

"Now why dont you follow your friends's exemple and go back to whatever sewer you crawled out of."

"Hey! Ease off there,friend," said the vampire. "I was just trying to help."

"Of course you were," retorted the man. "And i'm the virgin Mary."

"Pleased to meet you,Mary. You wanna tone down the attitude now?"

"Ooohh! I'm so sorry i hurt your feelings,you wretched little vermin!"

"Sorry? Trust me,pal,when i'm done here you will be!" spat a furious Angel.

But before he could make good on his threat,the dark alley was suddently flooded with lights coming from the end where the women had disappeared to. The bandana man turned towards the light for a moment but when he turned back to Angel,the vampire was nowhere in sight. Coming from bright light,he saw two beat cops,accompanied by the

prostitute,that ran up to him.

"Are you all right,sir?" asked one of the cop. "This woman told us you were both attacked here."

"Yes i'm fine,officer. I believe you scared them away."

"Nevertheless,we'd need you to come with us for a deposition,sir"

"Hum! Is that really necessary? I was hoping to catch a late movie tonight."

"Afraid it is sir. Besides,it wont take very long,so if you'll just come this way"

The bandana man ceased to argue and complied, following the police officers in silence. From his vantage point on a balcony overlooking the alley,Angel watched them walk out of the alley and towards a patrol car where they all got in and drove away. Having taken a few moments to calm himself down,he was analysing what had just occured here.

—

That guy knew i was a vampire,i'm certain of it. And yet,that didn't phase at all. I've seen bravado talk before but this was different; the man simply wasn't afraid of me. And what about the two terrified vamps that ran passed me. And the fact that i expected to find Buffy in here.

—

He sighed heavily as he climbed down in the alley

—

Well,whoever he is,i don't think he's my killer so he's not pressing matter right now.

—

Clearing his mind of the whole strange incident,Angel walked out of the alley and promptly resumed his patrol.

Jordan wasn't certain how long they had actually been running before they finally stopped but the ache in his body seemed to indicate that it was a good while. He had absolutely no idea as to why they did though. To the best of his knowledge,he had never run from anyone—or anything. Not even from his maker. And yet,this single man inspired in him a terror he had never felt before in his life.

"What—or what the hell happened back there?" Razor asked,still catching his breath.

"I dunno,Raz. All i do know is if that guy really wants the hooker,he can keep her,cuz i ain't going back."

"Me neither. He scared da crap out of me. Ya knowâ€¦i think he wuz a Slayer too."

"The Slayer's a chick,you nitwit!" Jordan told his lieutenant. "And she doesn't live in L.A.."

"Well what da hell wuz he then?"

"I told you; i dont know and i dont care. We'll just have to find ourselves another killing spot thats all. Like here for instance." said Jordan as he looked around them. The area was another part of town that wasn't very frequented at night. "Seems as good a place as any."

As they were inspecting their new hunting grounds,the vamps noticed that they weren't alone anymore. Down the street,they saw a blond woman that was walking toward where they were standing. At first,they licked their lips,thinking she would make a suitable replacement for the meal they had lost earlier. But as she got closer,they realized that she was another vampire,although she seemed to be in far worst shape than they. Her clothing consisted of torned up rags and she really was just skin and bones. Jordan caught a strange vibe coming from the advancing creature but before he could warn his companion,the later walked right up to her defiantly.

"Yo bitch! What da ya think yar doing,strollin' around here. This is our turf now so get yar bony ass outta here 'for i rip it ta pieces."

Without warning,the vampire female reached into Razor's chest and effortlessly ripped out his heart. The whole thing happened so fast that the poor vampire didn't realize he was dead until his body disintegrated on him. Jordan was stunned. He had never seen anything move that quickly before. One moment,Razor was getting in her face,and the next,he was a pile of dust on the floor. Then,the vampire woman turned to him and started walking in his direction. The terrified young vamp wanted to flee as fast as his legs would let him but something was keeping him in place,paralysed and helpless. When she got next to him,he closed his eyes,expecting to die as well any moment.

But instead,she made a low rasping sound and caressed his cheek with her bony hand. Suddently,he knew that she didn't mean him any harm. He knew that all she wanted was to find shelter from the sun. He knew she was tired and hungry. He also knew that she was much older than he was but,most importantly,he knew she would reward his services with great generosity. He had no idea how he had come to know all this but that wasn't important. He knew and that all that mattered. A moment later,he was able to move again. However,his feelings of appreansion were gone and he signaled the older vampire to follow him,intending to take her back to his lair.

When the night had begun,Jordan was just a ten year old fledgling at the head of a little gang of vamps. All in all,he was small potatoes in the grand skim of things. But now,he knew he was serving of the most powerfull vampire that ever was and,all of a sudden,he didn't feel so small anymore.

Later that night,the bandana man had returned to the alley where he saved the young prostitute earlier. He had spent the last few hours

answering questions at a police station about the woman's attackers. The man had been as vague as possible about their true nature, knowing full well they wouldn't have believed him anyway if he had told the whole truth. The entire thing had been one huge waste of time but he didn't regret saving young Cindy for it. That was the right thing to do and he knew it. But now, he would have to be extra carefull not to draw police attention on himself again. They weren't entirely convinced with the false indetifications he gave them and it wouldn't take them very long to realize that they lead to a man who doesn't exist. But here again, no one would have believed the truth so it was best to leave it at that and avoid the authorities from here on out.

However, there was something else bothering him altogether; the vampire that had stood his ground to him in the alley. The bandana man was used to fledgling vampires fleeing at the very sight of him but he also knew that older ones weren't so easily intimidated. Still, there was something even more peculiar to him about this vampire. He examined the alley, trying to remember exactly where the vamp had been standing. When he was certain he had located the exact spot, the man took a small glass container out of his pocket and emptied some of the silvery powder it contained in his right palm. He then took a step back and blew on the powder, sending it flying in the air before him. The particules that flew over where the vampire had stood became stuck there, effectively drawing his shape in mid-air.

—

A soul? That one has a soul? How can this be?

—

He put the flask back in his pocket and crossed his arms, still pondering on the repercussions of his findings.

—

Well this is perfect! I couldn't have planned this better myself. He's not a young one so he'll have strenght and experience. And he's got a soul so maybe i can convince him to help me. Now, the only question is; where do i find him? And i think i just might know where to start looking.

—

TO BE CONTINUEDâ€¦

End
file.